



SNAPSHOT: WILDLIFE

1 Status

- Wildlife habitats within the Forest are largely intact, and most species that were present prior to European settlement are still present today.
- The Forest supports a high level of terrestrial and aquatic species diversity (well over 600 different species).
- Different species have different habitat needs, and members of the same species may have different habitat needs based on age, gender, season of use, etc.
- Broad scale habitat diversity west to east across the Forest combined with fine scale habitat diversity (e.g. variation in elevation, aspect, slope, vegetation communities and successional stages) is needed to sustain the high level of species diversity that exists.
- Habitat connectivity is a crucial component for maintaining biodiversity and managing for viable populations of native species. Habitat connectivity implies a network of core (e.g. protected) areas and connecting corridors. Protected areas such as wilderness are primarily distributed at higher elevations on the western part of the Forest.
- Alpine (i.e. high elevation) habitats and associated species may be especially sensitive to changing climate conditions, but lower elevation habitats and species may also be impacted by climate change.
- The “threatened” grizzly bear occurs on the western part of the Forest, has been increasing in number and distribution in recent years and in March 2016 the USFWS proposed de-listing.
- Suitable habitat and designated critical habitat for the “threatened” Canada lynx occurs on the western part of the Forest. Since Lynx habitat on this Forest is at the southern end of their natural range, habitat here is more patchily distributed than more northern areas. Few lynx occurrences have been documented since the lynx was listed in 2000.
- Wolverines are “proposed for listing” and are present in much of the montane ecosystem of the Forest.
- Other federally recognized species that may occur on or near the Forest include the Northern long-eared bat, black footed ferret, least tern, whooping crane and red knot.
- The Forest Plan revision process will result in a list of “Species of Conservation Concern”. An initial list of *potential* “Species of Conservation Concern” will be included in the Draft Assessment of Existing Conditions. A separate poster explains “Species of Conservation Concern” in more detail.

2 Trends

- Recovery of the bald eagle, peregrine falcon and gray wolf.
- Elk populations have greatly increased on the eastern part of the Forest in the past 30 years.
- Bison tolerance has expanded outside Yellowstone National Park in both the Hebgen and Gardiner winter ranges. Based on a recent decision from the State of Montana bison will no longer be hazed off Horse Butte, where the majority of the bison remain outside the park and calve.
- Travel plan road closures between 2007 and 2014, have resulted in increases in security habitat for a variety of wildlife species on the western part of the Forest.
- Insect outbreaks and large fires have changed landscapes, vegetative cover and hiding for some species.

3 Information Gaps

- There is less habitat information available for the Ashland and Sioux Ranger Districts (RDs) than the western part of the Forest.
- Habitat connectivity information is limited for the Ashland and Sioux RDs.
- Validation is needed for model assumptions of habitat connectivity modeling.
- Potential “Species of Conservation Concern” (SCC):
 - Known occurrence in plan area for some species
 - Species population trend info for many species that otherwise meet criteria for SCC
 - Known or potential threats to some species that meet criteria

4 Need to Change Existing Forest Plans

- Recognize the dramatic ecological range of the Forest when developing wildlife management direction.
- Update and incorporate recent best science.
- Allow flexibility to adopt new methods and technology as it becomes available.
- Allow flexibility to account for the change in status for federally listed species over time.
- Include management direction for non-vertebrate species.
- There is lack of Forest-wide plan direction for wildlife habitat connectivity.
- The planning regulations require:
 - Replacing management indicator species (MIS) monitoring requirements with monitoring focal species.
 - Changing from the species viability requirements of the current Forest Plans to the need to manage for species viability across boundaries and jurisdictions.
 - Changing from sensitive species designation to species of conservation concern.